



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 January 2000

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Thirty-ninth session

13-23 February 2001

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

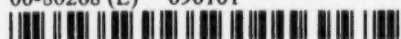
Follow-up to the International Year of the Family

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.5/2001/1.



I. Background

1. The present report is the fourth biennial report on follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family. It is prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/124 of 17 December 1999 and Assembly decision 54/437 of 17 December 1999. In the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-sixth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the appropriate ways and means to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004.

A. International Year of the Family

2. The United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989 proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family, with the aim of creating among Governments, policy makers and the public a greater awareness of the family and of promoting activities in support of families. A major principle underlying the proclamation of the Year was that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention. Hence, the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to families so that they may fully assume their responsibilities within the community.

3. The observance of the Year resulted in a significant record of accomplishments at all levels. These included, inter alia, greater awareness of the role of families and family issues; advancing the subject matter of families in the context of development; increased recognition of the importance of supporting families and of bringing about positive changes in the family realm; new initiatives and long-term activities in support of families all over the world, particularly at the local and national levels; strengthening and development of mechanisms devoted to family policy and research; mobilization of a global network of partners, particularly non-governmental organizations; and the recognition that, despite the diversity of families, many key issues relating to families are common across countries and regions, and that international cooperation on family issues is valuable.

B. Follow-up to the International Year of the Family, 1995-1999

4. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned achievements, the Year left some crucial issues unresolved and some gaps in policies. In particular, consensus was not achieved on the definitions and terminology related to the family, family policies and family-sensitive considerations. Partly because of this, the Year did not lead to the development of a long-term global plan of action on families, similar to the global programmes on the advancement of women, ageing, youth or disability.

5. In its resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly recognized that the basic objective of the follow-up of the International Year of the Family should be to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths, in particular at the national and local levels. A basic concern was the need to develop common understanding, to increase knowledge about family issues and to avoid stereotyping.

6. Achievements were also recorded during the follow-up phase. Many Governments formulated "family-sensitive" policies and improved national capacity for implementation. Attention was given to clarifying the concepts and terminology relating to the individual family member, family types and households. Family issues have been addressed repeatedly by United Nations intergovernmental bodies. Families have been increasingly recognized as objects and agents of social policy in many countries and mechanisms devoted to family policy and research have been developed or strengthened.

7. Furthermore, the major United Nations conferences, summits and meetings held since the International Year of the Family have addressed many issues and aspects related to the family and its role in social cohesion and integration. They have provided guidance for strengthening family-centred components of policies and programmes, as part of an integrated comprehensive approach to development. They have thus recognized the importance of family issues in the international dialogue on development.

8. Since the International Year of the Family in 1994, follow-up activities have been integrated into the work programme of the Division for Social Policy and

Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Accordingly, with a view to maintaining the momentum garnered during the year, the Department has adopted a multi-pronged approach with the following dimensions: (a) substantive servicing of intergovernmental bodies on issues related to families; (b) strengthening cooperation with concerned United Nations bodies and agencies; (c) initiating action-oriented research activities; (d) substantive support to technical cooperation activities in the field of families; and (e) strengthening cooperation with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and research centres.

9. In order to strengthen the consultative process with non-governmental organizations, the Secretariat held two United Nations Consultative Meetings of non-governmental organizations on the Family on 9 February 1998 and 9 February 2000, respectively. The meetings aimed at developing a joint long-term strategy and a common approach on family matters at the regional and global levels within the context of the follow-up to the Year.

10. Assistance continues to be provided through the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities to projects of direct benefit to families, particularly in developing and least developed countries. The Secretariat continued the substantive management of the Fund by reviewing requests from Governments and non-governmental organizations for funding, preparing funding recommendations and monitoring and evaluating projects. The reserves and fund balances of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities ending 31 December 1999 were \$484,944 (as reflected in the schedules of individual trust funds in the unaudited accounts for the biennium ended 31 December 1999).

II. Tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

11. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family constitutes an important opportunity to give a new impetus to the follow-up of the Year. In its resolution 54/124, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of the follow-up to the Year and of the observance of its tenth anniversary.

12. The objectives of the tenth anniversary of the Year would be to:

(a) Increase awareness of family issues among Governments as well as in the private sector;

(b) Strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;

(c) Stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;

(d) Undertake at all levels reviews and assessments of the situation and needs of families, identifying specific issues and problems;

(e) Enhance the effectiveness of local, national and regional efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families, generate new activities and strengthen existing ones;

(f) Improve collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families.

13. The tenth anniversary of the Year could be launched in December 2003 at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly. The observance of the tenth anniversary during 2004 could also culminate in the holding of plenary sessions of the Assembly on the topic of families. Results sought from the plenary sessions of the General Assembly in late 2004 would be devoted to: (a) an assessment of global trends that impact on families; (b) a review of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the implementation of objectives of the International Year of the Family since 1994; (c) a reaffirmation of commitments made and the identification of further actions, including encouraging the incorporation of effective family policies and programmes into national development strategies; and encouraging regional institutes to promote and undertake research and development of policies related to family issues.

14. Preparatory activities would start in 2001. At present, it is envisioned that preparations by the United Nations Secretariat will entail a wide range of activities, including an interregional meeting, along with efforts to encourage action-oriented research and the development of frameworks on family policies. The United Nations will strive to promote dialogue and consensus for furthering international cooperation on families. Greater efforts will be made to support the efforts of Governments in formulating family policies and programmes and in building their national capacities. Attention will be devoted to monitoring

trends, identifying significant family-related issues and analysing their policy implications, with a view to helping the international community to respond to long-term and emerging family-related issues.

15. While activities for the tenth anniversary could be undertaken at all levels, the primary focus should be on activities at the national and local levels. The value of the active participation by civil society should be recognized and utilized as a prerequisite for attaining the objectives of the Year.

16. The year 2004 could be seen as a target year by which time concrete progress should have been made in the identification and elaboration of issues of direct concern to families and in the provision of practical guidelines for national, regional and global actions as part of a sustained long-term effort to strengthen the economic and sustainable livelihood of families.

A. National preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

17. Governments will be encouraged to set up a mechanism for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family to stimulate, plan and coordinate activities by the appropriate governmental and non-governmental bodies and agencies and to liaise with the United Nations regarding the programme for the anniversary. Governments will also be invited to undertake, as part of their activities for 2004, sustained action at all levels concerning family issues, including studies and applied research, and concrete measures and approaches to promote the role of families in development and pursue national priorities related to family issues. Governments could furthermore be invited to prepare an agenda for national action for the anniversary, identifying specific family needs and proposing action programmes for implementation in 2004.

18. Governments will also be encouraged to consider developing family-impact assessments in their own development activities and to formulate, implement and evaluate family-sensitive policies and programmes in accordance with the objectives of the International Year of the Family. This could involve establishing or strengthening appropriate national mechanisms in respect of families.

19. National initiatives for the anniversary would be adopted by each Government in the light of its own situation and priorities and of the strategy for the International Year of the Family set out in resolutions of the General Assembly¹ on the Year and further supplemented by major United Nations conferences, summits and meetings held since 1994.

B. International preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

20. The year 2004 should also be the occasion for a discussion by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission for Social Development and other bodies of specialized agencies of the global situation of families and of how the United Nations system might approach family issues as an integral part of development. The organizations of the United Nations system should be encouraged to give wide support to the tenth anniversary and specifically to those aspects of the Year that are of particular relevance to their programmes.

21. United Nations agencies and bodies, including the regional commissions, will be encouraged to develop plans for the celebration of the anniversary. Within the parameters of the mandates of United Nations organizations and agencies, regional and global cooperation will be promoted and strengthened to support national action. This will entail enhancing advisory services provided to Governments upon their request, with a view to increasing their capacity related to family policies. The dissemination of information relating to the family and the sharing of experiences between countries should be facilitated. Furthermore, research activities on emerging and specific family issues should be carried out in cooperation with national, regional and international organizations and academic institutions. This would facilitate the exchange of information and stimulate international cooperation in the field of family research.

C. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

22. As the lead entity for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the Department will stimulate and coordinate activities for the preparation

for and observance of the anniversary. To that end, activities will be undertaken on the following five main substantive themes: approaches to family policy development; technology and its impact on the family; parental roles and intra-familial support systems; statistics and indicators for family well-being; and HIV/AIDS and its impact on families.

23. The Department will support the work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Council on the tenth anniversary of the Year. Reports and results of expert group meetings will assist the intergovernmental bodies in monitoring the progress achieved in the preparations for the tenth anniversary and provide relevant analysis and information to support the debate on relevant family policy issues.

24. The Department will undertake a broad campaign to promote the observance of the tenth anniversary at all levels. This will include activities such as the promotion of the annual observance of the International Day of Families inter alia to encourage the active celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at the national and local levels; advocacy about the importance of family issues in social development planning; and awareness-raising on the pivotal role of families and on their specific needs.

25. The Department will also undertake studies to increase the knowledge and information about relevant trends in the area of families. The studies will seek to enhance the capacity of Governments for formulating, implementing and evaluating family-related policies and programmes. More specifically, the Secretariat will undertake a study on information and educational technology and its impact on families in selected countries. The study will provide Governments with increased knowledge and enable them to make informed policy options as to how they will operate in the information age and assist in empowering families.

26. The United Nations recently completed two studies on family issues, entitled "A survey of family policies and programmes of eight selected countries"² and "Families and the world of work: four case studies".³ A database on family policy has been created, the web site of the Family Unit is periodically updated to facilitate access to information about the work of the United Nations in the arena of families and

a directory of national mechanisms on the family will be prepared.

27. The United Nations will hold an expert meeting in 2002 in cooperation with concerned partners. The meeting will aim to identify major regional trends affecting families and to exchange regional information on approaches for developing sustainable family policies. Governments are also encouraged to host national and regional meetings.

28. In order to assist Governments in addressing national priorities and emphasizing the family perspective in development planning, the United Nations will strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions, in particular at the national and local levels, through the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities. This will be accomplished by promoting family-specific pilot activities and programmes and supporting policy development in least developed and developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

29. Major demographic, economic, cultural and social changes have affected both the family as an institution and family members as individuals. In that context, Governments have striven to undertake actions to support and strengthen the family as a basic unit of society in the performance of its central functions. This requires an increased understanding of the problems and the current and future role of the family as an institution in different socio-economic and cultural conditions. It also calls for a further examination of national experiences with family-related policies. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family can be the occasion to reflect on those issues.

30. In this regard, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development:

(a) The Commission could review the proposals contained in the present report on the preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and recommend, through the Council and the General Assembly, that the preparations for the tenth anniversary proceed along those lines;

(b) The Commission for Social Development, during its thirty-ninth session in February 2001, may wish to review the preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family as part of its multi-year programme of work;

(c) For effective policy in the area of the family, special attention needs to be directed to strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, formulating of options and evaluation. Political will and commitment, the provision of adequate resource, infrastructure and personnel are key factors impacting on the situation of families;

(d) Within the context of preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary, the resources of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities need to be increased to assist Governments in formulating and implementing family-related policies and programmes;

(e) Research and academic institutions should be actively involved in the tenth anniversary in the related policy research. Partnerships should be strengthened between the producers and users of family-related research;

(f) During the preparations for the tenth anniversary, interaction between non-governmental organizations and families should be strengthened, with a view to mobilizing public opinion, contributing to the dialogue on international families and developing a culture of partnership.

Notes

¹ Resolutions 44/82 of 8 December 1989, 46/92 of 16 December 1991, 47/237 of 20 September 1993, 50/142 of 21 December 1995, 52/81 of 12 December 1997 and 54/124 of 17 December 1999.

² Ireland, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago (in print).

³ Argentina, Egypt, India and the Netherlands. United Nations publication, Sales No. 00.IV.5.